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AN  
ESSAY  
ON  
THE LIFE AND WRITINGS  
OF  
OPPIAN.  
BY THE REV. WILLIAM HAMILTON DRUMMOND,  
D. D. M. R. I. A.

Oppianum Cilicem admirabilem illum et nunquam satis laudatum poetam.  
*Tan. Faber, Epist. LXIV.*

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Read, April 26, 1819.

IN this country and in England, the name of Oppian is seldom mentioned, and but very little known; yet he has not been destitute of admirers, since first he recited his poems to a Roman audience, and won the approbation of the emperor, to whom they were particularly addressed. He has been quoted by the best writers of natural history, and justly praised for the elegance and truth of many of his descriptions. Among the Halieutic and Cynegetic poets, he deservedly holds the highest rank. His works may be considered as a valuable repository of the knowledge of the ancients on the subjects of hunting and fishing. I have, therefore, proposed to write an essay on the life and writings of this poet, hoping that such a

theme, not being foreign to the literary department of the Academy, will be received with their wonted candour and indulgence. Should it prove the means of making him more known to my countrymen, I shall be well compensated for my labour, and have the satisfaction of reflecting, that the gratitude due to his memory, for the pleasure which I have received from his writings, may thus be discharged.

To two writers, one of them an anonymous grammarian, the other Constantinus Manasses, who lived at Constantinople in the twelfth century, we are chiefly indebted for the history of Oppian.\* They have recorded few particulars, indeed, of his life, but these few are equally honourable to his character as a man, and success as a poet. He was born probably in the last year † of the reign of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, in Anazarba, a city of Cilicia. If he derived no honour from being the native of a country which had acquired and merited the double reproach of being greatly addicted to piracy and falsehood,‡ he might enjoy the nobler praise of reflecting a lustre on the land of his birth by his genius and virtues. Democritus was a glory to Thrace, and Anacharsis to Scythia. But Cilicia was not, like those countries, unknown to the Muses, and a stranger to refinement. On the contrary, it ranked high among the provinces of Asia Minor, that land of poets and philosophers, for the cultivation of the fine arts.

\* Vide *Belin de Belu*. Prolegomena in Opp. p. III.      † Idem.

‡ The alarming lengths to which the Cilicians had carried their piracies, in the time of Pompey the great, are well known to the classical reader. The other part of their character became proverbial, λογος παλαιος, μη ερδιως αληθευει της Κιλικιας. The τρια καππα κακιτα enigmatically expressed the infamy attached to the names of the Cappadocians, Cretans and Cilians. “ Augustinus, in grammaticis, indicat fuisse tortum in Corn. Syllam, Corn. Cinnam et Corn. Lentulum, Creditumque est in libris Sybillinis horum nomina tribus hisce literis fuisse designata.” ERASMI Adagia, p. 209.

Tarsus, its capital, though less frequented by strangers than Athens and Alexandria, claimed a superiority over both those cities, and every other seat of learning, for successful application to the study of philosophy and the sciences.\* It could boast of numerous distinguished philosophers both of the Stoic and Academic sects, and also poets, among whom Diogenes and Dionysides are worthy of mention, the one for the inspired facility with which his verses flowed on any given subject—and the other as forming one of the stars which composed the poetic constellation of the Pleiades in the court of Ptolemy. It had also the honour of producing the apostle Paul; Nestor the tutor of Marcellus, the son of Octavia; †—Athenodorus the eloquent and philosophic friend of Augustus;—and Hermogenes the sophist, who wrote a treatise on rhetoric at the age of fifteen, ‡ and acquired such reputation that M. A. Antoninus listened with pleasure to his discourses, and rewarded his genius with magnificent presents. That the other cities of the province were imbued with the same taste for letters as the capital, would be no unreasonable supposition, though we had no direct proof of its reality; for there is a contagion in literary improvement which is impatient to be diffused; and it seldom happens that one region is in a state of great mental activity without producing a corresponding action and meritorious emulation in others. Such was ac-

\* Τοσαντη δε τοις ενθαδε ανθρωποις σπεδη προς την φιλοσοφίαν, και την αλληγενήσιμην απόστη πάθησαν γεγονότα, μωδ' υπερβοληῆιαι, και Αθηνας, και Αλεξανδρειαν, και ε τινα αλλον τοπον διγεντοι επέντε εν ω σχολοι και διατριβαι των φιλοσοφων, και των λογικων γεγονοτοι. Strabo. lib. xiv.

† Idem.

‡ This Hermogenes was a striking proof of what has often been remarked of the precocity of genius, that it outgrows its strength, and decays as rapidly as it flourishes. At the age of twenty-five his memory was gone, and though he lived till an advanced age he soon relapsed into second childhood and became the contempt of those to whom he had once been an object of envy or admiration. “Hermogenes in peuritia senex, in senectute puer.”

tually the case in Cilicia. From Mallos, a city of this province, had sprung Crates, the cotemporary of Aristarchus. Like this critic he was a learned commentator on Homer, and was the first to introduce into Rome the study of grammar, when he appeared in that city as ambassador from Attalus the second, king of Pergamus. The small town of Laertes gave birth to Diogenes the celebrated biographer. Soli or Pompeiopolis contends with Tarsus for the honor of Chrysippus and Aratus, the author of the "Phenomena." Anazarba could boast of Asclepiades and Dioscorides, the former distinguished as the author of several compositions, particularly a treatise on rivers,\* the latter by his knowledge of medicine and botany.

The geographical features of the country from which the first impressions are taken, have commonly a lasting influence on the poet's genius. They are sometimes its exciting cause, and the true source of its inspirations. The scenes which delighted in childhood store his mind with images, and become the original of his poetic descriptions. In this respect Oppian was fortunate. Cilicia, in addition to the inspiring influences of an Asiatic climate, enjoyed many advantages favourable to the excitement and cultivation of poetic taste. One of its two divisions, known by the appellation of Trachea, the rough and stony, was characterised by lofty and precipitous mountains, adorned with romantic scenery, and abounding with the noblest quarry for the hunter. Its other division, the Campestrian, spread into extensive plains, whose fertility rendered it the most opulent of the Roman provinces. Its principal rivers were the Cydnus and Pyramus. The former flowed through Tarsus, and was remarkable for the crystalline purity of its waters, and the wooded magnificence of its banks. Its tempting beauty and cool-

\* Περὶ ποταμῶν. Vide Voss. de Hist. Græca.

ness had nearly proved fatal to Alexander the Great. The Pyramus which flowed past the city of Oppian, was of a more sublime description. As issuing from the defiles of Mount Taurus, it rushes through a rocky and tortuous channel to the sea, with a noise, says the scholiast who describes it, loud as thunder, it may have presented to the poet a lively picture of the inundation which he depicts so strongly, when speaking of the Orontes. Cilicia had, moreover, been the scene of many events so renowned both in real and mythological history, that they could scarcely fail to excite the emotions of a young and susceptible mind. Some of its cities had suffered from the ravages of the Greeks, in their famous expedition to Troy; and one of the female Cilician captives had given rise to the fatal contention on which the Iliad is founded. It had sent warriors to the siege of that city, and given Andromache a wife to Hector. One of its rocky passes had witnessed a mighty struggle between the armies of the East and West for the empire of the world. After the defeat of Crassus it became a frontier barrier of the Romans against the Parthian incursions. It may have derived some glory from being the province of the great master of Roman eloquence; and if, agreeably to the observation of Strabo, the names of places sacred to the Muses, are ample evidence that in such places poetry has been cultivated with success, Cilicia may claim no small share of poetical renown. It contained the famous saffron-bearing mountain Corycus: and the more famous Corycian cave, a favourite haunt of the Nine. Mallos was built by Mopsus, the son of Apollo and the nymph Manto, daughter of the prophet Tiresias. Another prophet equally renowned, Calchas,

*Καλχας Θεοριδης οιωνοπολων οχ' αριστος*

was said to have carried on a contest, in this country, with Mopsus,

for the palm of divination, or of power,\* and to have died of chagrin at being defeated. The city of Soli had the reputation of being built by the great legislator Solon. The son of Jupiter and Danæ was the founder of Tarsus. The Muse's horse, Pegasus, had dropped one of his foot-wings on the spot where it stood. From this circumstance the city was said to derive its name; and in the days of mythological belief, it might have been supposed to derive some portion of the Muses' inspiration.

With these advantages of soil and climate, united to their historical and fabulous associations, Oppian enjoyed the undivided affection of a father capable of giving a proper direction to his pursuits. Agesilaus was a man of the highest rank among the citizens of Anazarba, devoted entirely to letters, and living more as a philosopher than a man of the world. In voluntary seclusion from the intrigues of courts and the bustle of the forum, he spent his days in the instruction of his son, and sought happiness where it has its only permanent residence, in the bosom of domestic affection. His plan of education was liberal and expanded. It embraced music, geometry, grammar, and the whole circle of the sciences. His wife Zenodote shared the duty and the pleasure of the task; and subsequent circumstances lead us to infer, that they found in their pupil all the docility and all the affection which can flatter the hopes and secure the love of a parent.

While they were engaged in this delightful vocation, their country became the theatre of war. Severus was contending with Niger for universal sovereignty, and they were perhaps but little aware how much their future fortunes would be affected

\* Τον θεατον δι τη Καλχαντος ιντανθη παραδιδοσιν, αλλοι τι και Σοφοκλης. Ου μονο δε την περι της μαντικης εριν μεμνησικασιν, αλλα και της αρχης.

by the result. A battle at the famous strait where Darius had been vanquished by Alexander, decided the contest. The fortune of Severus prevailed, and Niger met an irretrievable defeat. Several of the provinces, by espousing the cause of the latter, had provoked the resentment of the conqueror. "His unfor-giving temper," to use the words of Gibbon, "stimulated by avarice, indulged a spirit of revenge where there was no room for apprehension. The most considerable of the provincials, who without any dislike to the fortunate candidate, had obeyed the governor under whose authority they were accidentally placed, were punished by death, exile, and especially by confiscation of their estates. Many cities of the east were stript of their an-cient honors, and obliged to pay into the treasury of Severus four times the amount of the sums contributed by them for the service of Niger." Among the suffering cities, it is probable, Anazarba was included, and Agesilaus might have incurred the usurper's resentment either by supineness in his cause, or by imputed attachment, to that of his rival. When the citizens of Anazarba waited on the victor to offer the usual congratula-tions, Agesilaus was not in the number. Hoping, perhaps, to escape notice, or deeming himself out of the reach of ma-lignant suspicion, he continued in the retirement of study, and lost the favourable opportunity of recommending himself to the imperial patronage. The jealous and tyrannical mind of Severus construed this neglect into a proof of intended dis-respect or avowed disaffection, and avenged it, by ordering him into immediate exile to Melita, an island in the Adriatic sea.

Oppian, his son, and it may be presumed his wife, went the vo-luntary companions of his banishment. Happily they had resources in themselves against the malignity of their destiny, and proved

experimentally the truth of Cicero's eulogy on the love of letters. Those studies which amused them in prosperity became the consolation of their misfortune. A mind imbued with a taste for literature finds solace in its own contemplations, and learns, in the acquisition of mental treasures, to forget the evils and deprivations it has suffered from the world. If to this taste be joined a love of nature, it becomes still more independent. Nothing, indeed, can be better calculated than a fondness for natural history, to recreate the mind and body, and preserve both in a state of healthful activity. It presents an ever-varying and inexhaustible fund of pleasure; and, while it inspires the most sublime sentiments of the wisdom and benevolence of the Deity, teaches man to be resigned to his lot. Who has read the volume of nature with success, and not become more virtuous and more happy?

Prior to his exile, Oppian must have laid the foundation of his future fame. Though the Halieutics were first made public at Rome, it is likely that the Cynegetics first occupied his attention, and that, though he did not finish, he composed the greater part of them, while he had an opportunity, in Cilicia, of acquiring experimental knowledge of the subject. His situation now, in an island surrounded by all the finny tribes of the Adriatic, was peculiarly favourable to his ichthyological studies. Here he might collect many facts both from the experience of the fishermen of the island and his own. In the poetical colouring and arrangement of these facts he found an uncloying feast, and instead of blaming the cruelty of the emperor, bewailing his condition with unmanly tears, or complaining of the injustice of fortune,\*

\* Ovid seems to have found only an image of his misfortunes in those objects which would have diverted a mind devoted to the study of natural history;

as Ovid had done in similar circumstances, he bore it with cheerful magnanimity as a philosopher. Not that he did not cherish an anxious wish of returning to his native country, that instinctive love of home which he has so beautifully described as adhering to the deer species, when taken from their native haunts.

Ἐξοχα δ' αὐ τοδε φυλον ἵον δόμου αμφαγαπαζει  
Ηθαλεας τ' εννας φιλιον τε ναταισι μελαθρον.  
Ει δε τε μιν σρεπτησι πεδησαντες βροχιδεσσιν  
Αγρευτηρες ἀγοιεν επ' ἀλλες αυτικα χωρες,  
Τηλοδι δ' ει βησσησιν ελευθερον ἀνδι λιποιεν,  
Ρεικ ποτι γλυκηρον δόμου ηλυθεν, ἡχι ναιεσκει,  
Ουδ' ετλη ξεινος τις επ' αλλοδαποισιν αλασθαι.  
Ουκ αρα τοι μενοισι φιλη πατρη μεροπεσσι  
Και βαλιων δε ποδος τις ενεστακαι φρησι θηρων.

Κυν. B. I. 306.

What wond’rous instinct bids the deer repair  
To well-known forests, and his wonted lair?  
Should hunters snare him in their tortuous toil,  
And lead him captive to a foreign soil,  
How soon, when freed among its wilds to stray,  
Back to his lov’d retreats he speeds his way!

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Estur ut occulta vitiata teredine navis,  
Æquoreos scopulos ut cavit unda salis,  
Sic mea perpetuos curarum pectora morsus,  
Fine quibus nullo confiantur, habent.

It must, however, be allowed that the cases are not exactly parallel. Oppian was young, and full of hope and expectation. Ovid was now advanced in years, he had experienced the pleasures of a court, and hope had ceased to flatter.

In the strange scene the exile loaths to roam,  
So dear his native haunts, so sweet is home !  
For not to man is love of home confined ;  
It rules as strongly in the savage kind.

Many great and learned men, when in exile or prison, have prepared their way to future fame and fortune, planned the enterprise which led to victory, or pursued the meditations which rendered their names immortal. Had not Seneca and Boethius been banished, neither of them, especially the latter, had written on the consolations of philosophy. The loss of his Mantuan estate led Virgil to the Court of Augustus; and poverty was the parent of those verses which secured to Horace the patronage of Mæcenas. But Oppian had a higher and more amiable incentive to stimulate his muse, than the desire of riches, or the favour of courts. He wished to be the means of restoring his father to his native country; and as the genius of poets had been successfully employed before, even under greater difficulties, he did not despair of accomplishing his wishes, by an exertion of poetic talent accompanied by some seasonable compliments to the imperial family. The characters too, both of the emperor and his wife Julia Domna, may have flattered his hopes. Severus, notwithstanding his cruelty and avarice, was a lover of learning, and exhibited striking proofs of his willingness to encourage its cultivators. He listened with pleasure to the discourses of Hermocrates, and honoured Arria, a lady of distinction, with his particular friendship, because she applied herself to the study of philosophy and the reading of Plato. According to Spartian, Aurelius Victor, and Eutropius, he had himself studied philosophy, and excelled in various branches of polite literature. Though the declaration of Dion were true, that he evinced

more inclination than ability to learn the liberal arts, his own want of talents did not render him less an encourager of those who possessed them. As to his wife Julia Domna, Gibbon says, that "she had applied herself to letters and philosophy with some success, and the most splendid reputation. She was the patroness of every art, and the friend of every man of genius." She sought by acts of liberality to mitigate the odium of dishonouring her husband's bed; and though abandoned to the indulgence of her licentious passions, she did not forget what she owed to her country and the advancement of learning. She procured the rights of Roman citizens for Emessa, the city of her birth. She induced Philostratus to undertake the life of Apollonius; and by her continued generosity to the literati, secured the fame of which she was solicitous.

Of such a woman, a young and accomplished poet might reasonably expect the countenance. And if we take into the account that her sister Julia Mæsa was married to Julius Avitus, a native of Apamea, a city familiar to Oppian, may it not be fairly conjectured, especially as he had given proofs of his poetical talent prior to his exile, that his name was not unknown to the Roman court before he appeared there in person, and that he had some reason for indulging the hope of being received and heard with candour and liberality?

That a taste for literature and the fine arts continued to be cultivated at Rome, and patronized by the reigning families long after the Augustan age, is evident to every reader of history. A taste for them became the fashion, and those who had it not, affected to have it. But the splendor of the age when Cicero spoke, and Virgil and Ovid sang, has attracted most eyes so forcibly, that they have been dazzled by its brilliancy, almost into blindness to all succeeding excellence. The honor bestowed on the past, weakens

the attention due to the present. If the old poets, Ennius and Lucilius, in the days of Horace, were the great themes of panegyric, no wonder if, in after times, the writers of the Augustan age should be thought to have so concentrated in themselves all the rays of eloquence and poetry, as to leave nothing to their successors but darkness and despair. But, though it be granted that they far surpassed their followers, it cannot be concluded that a taste for literature was not more general in succeeding times, and that some real genius was not always starting up, among the tribes of sophists and poetasters, to vindicate the honor of true taste, and prevent a total declension into barbarism.

Eloquence in Rome being so indispensable to success in civil, and frequently, in military employments, proved a very important part of education, and its culture necessarily involved that of other branches of literature. Hence it happened, for a long series of years, that the emperors themselves were often renowned, not only for their proficiency in oratory and poetry, but for their patronage of men of letters, in which they seem to have made Augustus their model, and wisely considered it as a necessary part of the imperial character. Tiberius, that monster of debauchery, was fond of the liberal arts, and, though he is perstringed by Juvenal for the verbosity of his style, he was no mean orator in his vernacular tongue, which he spoke with great fluency. He also wrote lyric verses, and shewed his esteem for genius by erecting statues of the poets Euphorion, Rhianus, and Parthenius. Even the atrocious Caligula shewed himself willing to render a service to history, by allowing the books of Titus Labienus, Cremutius Cordus, and Cassius Severus, which had been prohibited in the reign of Tiberius, to be freely perused. The very vanity which led him to display his eloquence in the senate, in behalf of friend or foe, as the

cause of either best suited the exhibition of his powers, and his institution of the famous rhetorical competitions at Lyons, though followed by such ludicrous results, shew that the interests of literature were not forgotten. He pleaded causes after he had obtained the honor of a triumph, and composed comedies in Greek which were extant in the time of Suetonius. His successor Claudian, according to Seneca, was an encourager of learning as well as a writer. He wrote two histories, one of the Tyrrhenians in twenty books, the other of the Carthaginians in eight; and added three letters to the Roman alphabet, one of which is only conjectural, the other two, the Æolic digamma and the anti-sigma are well known. Though Nero thought it the acmé of glory to be hailed as the best harper in the world, he did not disdain the praise of eloquence. While he was yet a youth he pleaded the causes of the Ilians, the Rhodians, and the people of Bononia, with such ability, that he gained their respective suits. His cruelty in putting Seneca and Lucan to death, is no proof of his hostility to philosophy and poetry. He might punish the indiscretion of an artist, without any wish to exterminate the art. Galba was well versed in the sciences, and had made civil law his particular study. Vespasian, the only one of all the emperors whose moral character, as Tacitus observes, was meliorated by the possession of power, promoted both the fine arts and the mechanical, more than any of his predecessors. He invited the most celebrated poets to Rome, and gave annual salaries, payable out of the public treasury, to the Greek and Latin professors of rhetoric. His son, the virtuous Titus, was both an orator and a poet, and could speak on any subject with fluency and learning, without premeditation. If Domitian did not feel, he pretended, a love for letters, and is said to have succeeded so well in composition, that he was the admiration both, of Pliny and Quin-

tilian. The translation of Aratus which has reached our time, is, in the opinion of Vossius, undoubtedly the work of this emperor. His subsequent tyranny, indeed, frustrated the hopes which these promises gave, and his banishment of the philosophers merited the keen reprobation which it has received from the philosophic pen of Tacitus. Nerva, who succeeded, was also a poet. His elegant verses had gained him the friendship of Nero, and the honor of having his statue erected in the palace of that tyrant. Though Trajan was prevented, by having spent his younger years in a camp, from obtaining the renown of a scholar, the encouragement which he gave to learning, appears in the great number of eminent writers who flourished in his reign, among whom the names of Juvenal, Tacitus, and the younger Pliny, are the most distinguished. Adrian, at the age of fifteen, had made such proficiency in the study of Greek, that he was named the young Grecian. Gifted with a memory capacious and retentive almost beyond credibility, a memory which could repeat a whole volume after a single perusal, and name every soldier in the Roman army, he excelled at once in every branch of literature, science, and the fine arts. He united the lighter pursuits of painting and music to the study of physic, botany, and mineralogy; the grammarian's accuracy to the orator's vehemence, and the enthusiasm of the poet to the patience of the mathematician. He gave a welcome reception in his court to all who had signalized themselves in these pursuits; and often found amusement in disputing with the philosophers, and challenging the poets in extemporaneous verses, which he poured forth with the fluency of an improvisatore. He also wrote a Greek poem entitled the Alexandriad, and several other works both in prose and verse. Florus, Suetonius, and Arian the disciple of Epictetus, adorned his reign. Antoninus Pius was frugal of the treasury, and deemed it a

shame that the property of the public should be devoured by useless vermin: accordingly, he suppressed among other salaries which had been too lightly bestowed, that of Mesodemus, a lyric poet, who had obtained a pension from Adrian, for some elegiac lines on the death of his favourite Antinous. But he was, notwithstanding, a generous patron of learned men, particularly of those engaged in the education of youth, and gave them, through all the provinces, the most liberal support. The name of M. Aurelius speaks a volume. At the age of twelve he ranked among the philosophers, wore their habit, and practised their austerities. In oratory, philosophy, and a knowledge of civil law, he had no equal. The encouragement which he gave to literature degenerated into indiscriminate liberality. For, though many deserving men enjoyed his bounty, others partook of it who had no recommendation but their beards. Celsus, Lucian, Apuleius, Polyænus, Pausanias, probably Au. Gellius, and the two Sexti, the stoic and the empiric, were among the writers of this period. Even Commodus, the most execrable savage that ever disgraced a throne, was the patron of Julius Pollux, who had been one of his preceptors, and inscribed to him the work entitled “Onomasticon.” Mention has already been made of Severus.\*

From the cursory review which has thus been taken of the literary taste of the Roman emperors, from the time of Augustus to that of Severus, an interval of about two hundred years, of the encouragement which they gave to letters, and the number of eminent writers who lived during this period, it will appear, that literature has no great reason to complain of its interests being neglected by those whose influence could promote them best; or that the great efforts of the Augustan age had exhausted the human

mind, and left it effete.\* The investigation might be followed to a much later period, with a similar result. But this may suffice to show that Oppian did not appear in a barbarous age, nor among a people unimbued with taste, or incapable of appreciating poetical excellence.

No reason has been assigned for Oppian's selection of fishing, as a subject favourable to the design he had formed of recommending himself to the imperial family at Rome. It is not to be doubted, however, that it was congenial to his own taste, and that of the age. He gives it the epithet of "*spartimy*," beloved; and his works contain abundant evidence that they could be composed by no one who was not passionately addicted to the pleasures which they describe. The Romans were exceedingly fond of aquatic excursions, and the representation of naval engagements on their lakes. To these Lucretius alludes in the beginning of his second book;

Fervere quom videas classem, lateque vagari.

Augustus dug a lake near the Tiber, and Domitian built a theatre, for these entertainments. But Claudius, to give them a higher zest, at the draining of the Fucine lake, had a real battle between two fleets, the one of Rhodes, the other of Sicily, each consisting of twelve vessels of three banks of oars, whose crews were composed of condemned malefactors, to the number of 19,000. The signal was given by a silver triton, raised by mechanism out of the lake. The conflict was bloody, and the majority of the combatants perished.—Caligula delighted to sail along the coast of Campania, in gallies of cedar magnificently appointed. Tigillinus gave a splendid feast

\* The French Encyclopedie, in the article Age, having spoken of Horace, Ovid, Cicero, &c. adds "Fatigué d'avoir donné le jour à tant d'hommes immortels, la nature se repose pendant plusieurs siècles!" This is in the true Gallic style.

to Nero on the lake Agrippa, in a large vessel towed by others of inferior size, embellished with ornaments of gold and ivory. The feast, to harmonize with the scene, consisted entirely of wild animals. Fishing formed a part of these amusements; and the emperors did not disdain to handle the implements of the art. Eutropius numbers it among Nero's luxurious vices, that he fished with golden nets, drawn by purple ropes.\* A passage, near the commencement of the first Halieutic, shews that the family of Severus sometimes enjoyed this recreation. The imposition practised by Pythias, the goldsmith of Syracuse, on Canus, the Roman knight, as related in the third book of Cicero's Offices, shews how much a good fishing coast enhanced the value of a country residence, in the estimation of the Romans. And the fourth satire of Horace's second book, if we had no other documents, would show how well they appreciated the various excellencies of fishes, as articles of luxury. Their fish-ponds were supported at immense expence, and sometimes sold for the most exorbitant sums. Nor were they contented with having one sense gratified at the cost of this part of the animal creation. They had certain fishes, particularly the mullet, brought to table alive in vases, that they might feast their eyes with the change of colours exhibited in their dying agonies.†

Hunting was followed, as an amusement, less by the Romans, than the Greeks. It is classed by Sallust, in his philosophising mood, with agriculture, among servile employments. But he speaks

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\* *Retibus aureis piscaretur quæ blateis funibus extrahebat.* EUTROP. lib. vii. c. 14.

† *Mullum exprantem versicolori quadam et numerosa varietate spectari, proceres gulæ narrant, rubentium squamarum multiplici mutatione pallescentem, utique si vitro spectetur inclusus.* C. Plin. Nat. Hist. Liber. ix. c. 17.

of it as a necessary means of subsistence, not as the recreation of the wealthy and powerful. With these it has ever been a favourite sport, and among the Romans, a high degree of eclat was attached to success in it, as we may infer from the artifice of Gargilius, (in Horace) who bought a boar, and had it carried on a mule through the forum, that he might enjoy the reputation of having killed it in the chace.

Gargilius qui mane, plagas, venabula, servos,  
Differtum transire forum populumque jubebat,  
Unus ut e multis, populo spectante, referret  
Emptum mulus aprum.

Independently then of their general interests, as embracing a knowledge of animated nature, it may be inferred that the subjects of fishing and hunting had peculiar attractions for a Roman ear. Taste, like dress and equipage, has its changes and revolutions. If georgics were a favourite topic, in the days of Virgil, field sports may not have been less so, in the days of Oppian. Ovid,\* if the disjointed fragment ascribed to him be his, had written on Halieutics ; and Gratius Faliscus, his contemporary, on hunting. The writings of Seneca, Pliny, and Athenæus who devoted a considerable portion of his work to ichthyology and the writers on that subject, had awakened public attention. Add to this that the games of the Circus,† and the frequent exhibition of

\* Ennius too, at a much earlier period, had written on fishes. See L. Apuleii Apologia. Q. Ennius Ηδυταθητικος quæ versibus scripsit, innumerabilia piscium enumerat.

† Every species of wild beast was exhibited at these games ;

Quodcunque tremendum est  
Dentibus, aut insigne jubis, aut nobile cornu,  
Aut rigidum setis, capitur; decus omne timorque  
Sylvarum, non caute latent, non mole resistunt.

CLAUDIAN.

wild beasts and birds collected from every region of the empire, necessarily introduced some knowledge of natural history to the Romans, and rendered every thing connected with it interesting.

The adaptation of such subjects as fishing and hunting to poetry, not being the business of the present inquiry, let it suffice to observe that the success of Oppian justified his choice. The most unpromising subject, in the creative hands of a poet, assumes a character of which a dull imagination is unable to form any conception. He covers the naked rock with verdure, and renders the most sterile soil prolific.

The Halieutics being completed, Oppian repaired to Rome, and, according to the custom of the age, announced their public recital, in the temple of Apollo. This was a mode of giving rapid publicity to every new composition, and, under proper management, it might have been attended with the most beneficial results. But, as it afforded too much room for party spirit and intrigue, it may have sometimes tended to repress the spirit of true genius, by unmerited reprehension; and to exalt the mediocrity which could condescend to bribe applause, into an elevation which nothing but solid learning and the most brilliant talents could long support. Oppian, however, was fortunate in having a candid audience. Severus and his family honoured him with their presence, and the poet had

Some were collected merely for curiosity, as Crocodiles, and various species of beasts and birds; but the more ferocious kinds were for the combat.—See Kennet's Ants.

J. Cæsar opposed 20 elephants to 500 men on foot. Twenty more with turrets on their backs, and 60 men to defend each turret, engaged with 500 foot and as many horse. Titus, at the dedication of the Colisæum, gave 5000 wild beasts to be slain. (Eutrop.) M. Antoninus was said to have 100 lions in the exhibition of the games, after a victory. (Eutrop. lib. viii. c. 14.)

Vitellius, at one supper, had 2000 fishes and 7000 birds.

taken the proper precaution, according to the precepts of the Rhetoricians, to secure their benevolent attention, by his complimentary exordium. The event exceeded his expectations. The emperor expressed such gratification, that he proposed to give him whatsoever remuneration he chose to ask. The object of Oppian was now attained, and he immediately asked the restoration of his father. The piety of the request was pleasing to the emperor; and he not only granted it, but ordered that he should receive a stater for each of his verses; a gratuity equally honourable to the generosity of the prince, and the merits of the poet.

The *verses* of Oppian, on account of their eminent success and splendid reward, received the epithet of golden; as those of Pythagoras had been honored by a similar title, for the superior praise of their excellent morality. According to Suidas, he was gifted with twenty thousand staters,\* from which it is inferred that his verses must have amounted to the same number, though little more than a fourth part of them now remains. The Palatine manuscript of his anonymous biographer, as quoted by Belin de Belu, says that he was so enriched by the emperor's liberality, that he transcribed his poems in letters of gold.

Thus did Oppian, in the highly meritorious performance of a filial duty, find himself suddenly advanced to a high elevation of fame and fortune. He returned in triumph with his parents to Anazarba, honored as the best of poets, and most exemplary of sons. The indubitable proofs of genius which he had given, justify

\* A golden stater was equivalent to 16*s. 4d.* of our money. Two myriads, or 20,000 of them would be above £16,000, a sum far exceeding what Octavia gave to Virgil. That Oppian should receive such an enormous sum is scarcely to be credited. It is not thus that poets are remunerated. But it is by no means necessary to suppose that all his poems had a share in the munificence of the emperor.

the supposition, that, had he lived till his powers acquired full vigour and maturity, he might have contested the palm of superiority with the most renowned poets of antiquity. But he did not long survive to enjoy his good fortune, or accomplish his poetical projects. He died a victim to the plague, about the thirtieth year of his age, to the inexpressible regret of his parents and countrymen. The latter shewed their grief for his loss, and honor for his memory, by erecting his statue, and engraving on its base the following inscription :

ΟΠΠΙΑΝΟΣ κλεος ειλον αιοιον, αλλα με μοιρης  
 Βασιλανος εξηρπαξε μιτος, πρυνερος τ' Αιδας με  
 Και νεον οντα κατεσχε τον ένεπιης υποφητην.  
 Ει δε πολυν με χρονον ζων\* μιμινειν φθονος αινος  
 Εισασεν, ουκ αν τις μοι ισον γερας ελλαχε φωτων.

### OPPIAN.

On me the Muse had deathless fame bestowed,  
 But Fate, too soon life's thread asunder tore ;  
 Stern Pluto dragged me to his dark abode,  
 While yet in youth I wooed the Muse's lore :  
 My life, till age, had Fate malignant spared,  
 No poet e'er had brighter glories shared.

\* “ζων abest a Cod. Sylb. qui duos ultimos versus sic legit.”

Ει δε πολυν με χρονον μιμινειν φθονος αινος εισασεν  
 Ουκ αν μοι τις ισον κλεος ελλαχειν εν χρονι φωτων.

The muse of Oppian was employed on three subjects, fishing, hunting, and fowling. His poem on the first, consisting of five books, has come down to us entire. The last book of the Cynegetics has been lost. The Hixeutics, containing two books, have been partially preserved in a Latin translation by Gesner,\* in whose days the original was said to be kept in an Italian library. Other works have been attributed to Oppian, and we have his own words to show that he wrote dithyrambics. He also informs us that he intended to exercise his genius on a more exalted theme, of which he is thought to give a specimen in his description of the Orontes.

Some writers seem to be of opinion that Oppian was a generic name of such poets as wrote on marine subjects,† and they endeavour to support it by etymology. Certain it is, that a poet of this name furnished Martial with the subject of a satiric epigram. Schneider, a learned German editor of Oppian, strenuously maintains, that the author of the Cynegetics, and the author of the Halieutics, were two different persons, the former a native of Apamea, a city of Syria, who lived in the reign of Severus and Caracalla, and wrote in a style altogether inelegant. The latter, he affirms, flou-

\* Ego nullum ex scriptoribus nondum publicatis hactenus consequutus, præter Græcam paraphrasin in Oppiani Ixeutica, id est de aucupio libellos, quos quidem Latinos feci, et passim huic de avibus volumine inserui. CON. GESNER.

† Thus we have “the Lake poets” of our own days. “Non omittendum hic videtur qualem nominis Grammatici seu Scholiastæ Oppiano attribuant, qua de re hæc verba reperi in antiquo Cod. M. S. Frederici Sylburgii mei. Οππιανος επυμολογεῖται ἀπὸ οπτω τη βλεπε και τη αλος, ή θαλασσα, γινεται Οπτιαλος, και τροπη τη τ ής π, και τε λ ής ρ, Οππιανος, ή τας θαλασσης αγρεις επιτηρειν. Sive igitur hinc nomen Oppiano impositum sit, sive aliunde, concinna est hac etymologia; dummodo sciamus, hoc idem nomen aliis etiam ante hunc poetam fuisse, ut ex Martiali docebo.”

Esset, Castrice, cum mali coloris,  
Versus scribere cœpit Oppianus.

Lib. vii. 3.

rished in the reign of M. A. Antoninus, the philosopher;—that he was a citizen of Anazarba, the genuine Oppian, whose poem on fishing is as much distinguished by its Grecian purity and sweetness, as the other by its latinized Greek, and its frequent deviations from the authorized principles of composition. He endeavours to support the hypothesis by internal evidence, and the testimonies of Suidas, Eusebius, Hieronymus, and Athenæus; with what success remains to be considered.

Belin de Belu, a Frenchman who published an excellent edition of the Cynegetics in 1786, in his preface, has vigorously opposed the German editor; yet Schneider, in a late edition of Oppian, has returned to the contest. According to the German, Suidas affirms that, in the reign of M. Antoninus, Oppian brought his talents into notice, “ingenium extulisse.” But, replies Belu, this is saying more than the text of Suidas authorizes, though it were even granted that he means M. Antoninus, the philosopher, and not M. Antoninus, who was named Caracalla.\* His words are, *γεγονὼς επὶ Μαρκῷ Αντωνίῳ βασιλεῶς*, and they notify only the time of the poet’s birth which might have taken place about the conclusion of the former emperor’s reign. For from his death till that of Severus,

\* Hallucinatio nata est ex nomine Antonini; non enim Antoninus philosophus est, cui dicata sunt Halieutica, sed Antoninus Caracalla, cui, vivo adhuc Severo patre, divinum illud epos Oppianus obtulit. Scaliger.

With much reason is Gibbon surprised to find the Caracalla of Roman history, in the Caracul of Macpherson’s Ossian. “In the Caledonian war,” says he, “the son of Severus was known only by the appellation of Antoninus; and it may seem strange, that the Highland bard should describe him by a nickname, invented four years afterwards, scarcely used by the Romans till after the death of that emperor, and seldom employed by the most ancient historians.”

was an interval of little more than thirty years, about the same space of time that Oppian lived.\* Now, since Oppian, immediately on obtaining his father's restoration, returned to Anazarba where he died; the time of his death seems, with much probability, to have happened soon after that of Severus, or in the first year of the reign of Caracalla, and consequently his birth may have taken place under Antoninus the philosopher.

The testimony of Eusebius appears more pointed. His words are *Ἐπὶ Μαρκὸς Αὐτῶν Οππιανός τὴν Ἀλιευτικὴν συνεγράψατο*. But all their force as an argument in favour of Schneider is lost, unless it be proved that they apply to the philosophic emperor, and not to Caracalla. Belu maintains, with Scaliger, that it is of the latter only they are to be understood. The work of Hieronymus in which Oppian is mentioned, being a translation from Eusebius, adds nothing to the argument.

The evidence of Athenæus is considered by Schneider, as decisive in his favour. Athenæus is generally supposed to have written in the time of Commodus, for he speaks of that emperor as his cotemporary *ὁ καθ' ἡμᾶς*, and of having seen him driving in a chariot armed with the club of Hercules. Again, he mentions Oppian as having lived a short time before him, *τον ολιγῷ πρὸ ημῶν γενομένον Οππιανὸν Κιλίκην*. Hence the inference that our poet must have flourished before the reign of Caracalla or Severus. Belu replies that the phrase, *καθ' ἡμᾶς*, cannot apply to a cotemporary, but to a person defunct; and that Commodus must have been dead when it was written. The passage *ολιγῷ πρὸ ημῶν*, he thinks, is an

\* Belu's chronology does not correspond with Gibbon's and Wotton's. According to him M. A. Antoninus died A. D. 182, and Caracalla began to reign A. D. 212; whereas it is more accurately ascertained that the former event took place March 17, A. D. 180, and that Severus died February 4, 211.

interpolation of the writer who abridged the two first books of the *Deipnosophists* of Athenæus, as Justin abridged the history of Trogus Pompeius. But what necessity for this supposition? Athenæus might have seen Commodus, as he declared he did, and lived till the reign of Caracalla, and after the death of Oppian. In this there is nothing at all inconsistent or improbable. Though he is supposed by Suidas to have flourished in the time of M. Aurelius, the very passage under consideration, proves that he also flourished under Commodus, and Vossius adds, Pertinax and Severus. A work of such various and extensive erudition as the *Deipnosophists*, and it is only one of his works, may well be allowed to require and occupy the labours of a long life.\*

The hypothesis of Schneider is not supported by the testimony of any ancient writer, nor do any of the biographers of Oppian appear to suspect the two poems commonly ascribed to him, to be the composition of different pens. Eusebius speaks of only one Oppian, a Cilician; Sozomen of one who was rewarded by Severus; and Manasses, with the anonymous biographer, of one who wrote on fishing and hunting. Schneider, notwithstanding, thinks he has found internal evidence sufficient to prove that the author of the *Cynegetics* was not of Anazarba, but Apamea. Unfortunately for his cause, the principal passage on which he rests is acknowledged to be corrupt. It occurs in the second book of the *Cynegetics*, where the poet is speaking of the Orontes, and the inundation of the Apamean plains.

## E 2

\* Athenæus himself shews, beyond all question, that he long survived the reign of Caracalla; and, therefore, might well speak of Oppian, as having lived some time before him. In the XV book, 23d c. of the *Deipnosophistis*, he mentions the death of Ulpian, the friend and minister of Alexander Severus; an event which did not happen till A. D. 228—sixteen or seventeen years after Oppian's death.

Vid. Animad. in *Athenæum*. Tom. prim. Argentorati, 1801.

*Αυτος δ' εν μεσαγοσι επαιγιζων πεδιοισιν  
 Αιεν αεξομενος, και τειχεος εγγυς οδεων  
 Χερσον ομης και νησου, εμην πολιν, ιδατι χενων.*

He considers this text as erroneous, because it consists of participles without a verb,\* and to rectify it, changes *χενων*, in the last line, into *χενει*.† Belu agrees that the reading is wrong, but says, the error lies in the pronoun *ἐμην* which should be the verb *ειη*. This, he maintains, was the original text ; but the *ε* in old manuscripts, particularly those of the twelfth century, having a resemblance to *η*, the carelessness of some transcriber wrote it in that form ; and the *ν* being afterwards added, to suit the concord, gave a new country to the poet of Anazarba.

Another passage quoted by Schneider to assist his argument, is from the second book, where the poet having spoken of the temple of Memnon in the vicinity of Apamea, says,

*'Αλλα τα μεν, κατα κοσμον, αεισομεν ενδεα καλλη  
 Πατρης ἡμετερης, ερατη Πιμπληδι μολπη'*

Here, says the critic, is the writer's own confession that Apamea is his country. Belu to remove the difficulty, instead of *ἡμετερης* reads *ὑμετερης*, and supposes the poet to be addressing Julia and her son Antoninus Bassianus ; to which Schneider objects, because the poem commences with an address to Antoninus alone. But not to give so much importance to a single word, surely a poet might be allowed, without any great violation of propriety,

\* "Judicans et quidem recte, locutionem, quæ solis constat participiis, subsistere non posse" Belu-*Prologomena* p. xv.

† Schneider has further judiciously rectified the passage, by changing *ιπαγιζων* into *ιπαγιζειν*.

to call that country his own which lies contiguous to the land which is so in reality, especially when he is a great distance from both. If a native of Middlesex, when removed to some remote climate, chanced to speak of the romantic beauties of Cumberland or Wales, and in the warmth of poetical inspiration, called it his own country, must a critic infer that he was a native of either of these regions? As distance diminishes the appearance of the shores we leave, it seems to increase the comprehension of the patriotic sentiment; and it is not the individual spot where we first drew breath, but the province, the island, or the whole kingdom, that is embraced in the endearing appellation of country.\*

The Halieutics contain, in themselves, abundant proof that their author solicited the regard of two imperial patrons. Were it clearly ascertained what two were meant, the question would be decided. All the poet's biographers, with the exception of Schneider, suppose he intends Severus and Antoninus, *i. e.* Caracalla. The latter was proclaimed by the army, after the reduction of Ctesiphon, partner in the empire with his father, and accordingly the poet writes,

Εξ ε μοι κρατεσσι, μεγαν Θρονον εμβεβαυτες  
Αμφα, θεοπεπιος τε πατηρ και φαιδριμος ορπηξ.

LIB. ii. v. 682.

And again,

Σοι τε, μακαρ, και παιδι μεγανχει παιει θηρης.

LIB. i. v. 66.

\* Since this passage was written, I have found that Bodinus, who published an edition of Oppian, Lutetiae, 1555, entertained a similar sentiment. "Quia Ciliciæ proxima est Syria, utramque patriam appellat."

But, says Schneider, these lines are addressed to M. Aurelius and his son Commodus. In confirmation of his opinion, he quotes the following lines, and it must be acknowledged, they favour his opinion more than any other of his arguments :

Αλλα συ μοι, καρτιστε πολισταχων βασιλεων,  
Αυτος τ' Αυτωνινε και οιεος ηγαθεον κηρ,  
Προφρονες εισαιοιτε.

LIB. iv. v. 4.

This is a serious difficulty. The only solution I can offer, without concurring with Schneider, is the following, and the learned reader may judge of its validity. Caracalla had a son by his wife Plautina. Both the mother and her child became objects of the tyrant's hatred and persecution. But, notwithstanding, might not the poet have intended a compliment to the father, in thus invoking the patronage of his son, though an infant, who might be regarded as successor, or heir apparent, to the empire ?

As to any argument founded on the style of the two poems, I think it decidedly against the hypothesis of Schneider. The style of each contains as strong evidence as the most incredulous critic can require, that one pen was the writer of both : for in both do we not only meet the same images and sentiments, clothed in nearly the same expressions, but the same train of thought and mode of illustration ? These resemblances are not casual, nor like the imitations of one poet from another ; but they exhibit the same disposition and complexion of thought diffused through different topics, in such a manner as evinces them to be emanations of an individual mind. Each discovers that the author of the one possessed a familiar knowledge of the subject of the other. The

habits of beasts and fishes are compared in each, and introduced for the sake of mutual illustration. Thus, in the first Halieutic, a ship arrested in the middle of her course, by the adhesion of the Remora, or sucking fish, is assimilated to a wild beast suddenly struck by the shaft of the hunter. The habits of the bear, in the third Cynegetic, resemble those of the Polypus. The one retires in the wintry season, to the shelter of his cavern ; the other to his habitation in the deep : the one finds sustenance in licking his paws, the other in the corrosion of its cirri. The same fondness for his native haunts which we have already seen ascribed to the deer, in the second book of the Cynegetics, is ascribed to the lobster in the first of the Halieutics : and each description is accompanied with similar reflections couched in almost the same language.

Αστάκος αυ περι δη τι και σ φαγον οίου ερωτα  
 Οικεῖται θαλαμης κευθει φρεσιν, ωδε ποτ' αυτης  
 Δειπτεδ' ἐκαν, ἀλλ' ει μιν αναγκαιη τις ερυσσας  
 Τηλε φερων ετερωσε παλιν ποτονδε μεθει,  
 Αύταρ δη' σ μετα δηρον εην νοστησε χαραδρην  
 Σπειδων, ωδ' ἐθελει ξεινον μυχον ἀλλον ελεσθαι,  
 Ουδ' ετερης πετρης επιβαλλεται, αλλα διωκει  
 Και δομον, ον κατελείπε, και ηθεα και νομον ἀλμηη  
 Κεινης, η μιν εφερε, και υπ ηχης θαλασσαν,  
 Της μιν ἀπεξεινωσαν ἀλισθοοι αγρευτηρες.  
 Ως ἄρα και πλωτοισιν ἐος δομος ἡδε θαλασσα  
 Πατρωη, και χορος ἐφεστιος, ενθ' εγενοντο,  
 Σταζει εις κραδη γλυκερον γανος, ωδ' αρα μενοις  
 Πατρις ἐφημεριοισι πελει γλυκερωτατον ἀλλων.  
 Ουδ' αλεγεινοτερον και κυντερον, ος κεν ἀναγκη

*Φυξιπολιν πατρης τελεση βιον ἀλγινοεντα,  
Ξεινος εν ἀλλοδαποισιν ατιμης ζυγον ελκω.*

HALI. 4. l. 263.

So dear the lobster loves his native home,  
 Nought e'er can lure him from its bounds to roam ;  
 But if transported, by some stern decree,  
 To distant shores, then left to wander free,  
 Around no foreign rock his arms he flings ;  
 To no new chamber in the deep he clings ;  
 But back, with eager speed, his path explores  
 To his loved grottoes, and his well-known shores ;\*  
 Nor dreads his wonted pasture to regain,  
 Tho' banished thence by hunters of the main.  
 Dear to the finny tribes their native waves,  
 Their sands paternal, and their coral caves ;—  
 Each haunt sweet rapture on their hearts distils :  
 Not man alone the patriot passion thrills ;  
 These feel it too, and well with him they know  
 That angry fate inflicts no direr woe  
 Than durance sad, beneath her ruthless stroke,  
 In hopeless exile, and a shameful yoke.

\* These lines, and still more those on the deer, page 11, remind us of our own pathetic Goldsmith's verses on a similar topic :

And as a hare whom hounds and horns pursue,  
 Pants to the place from whence at first she flew,  
 I still had hopes, my long vexations past,  
 Here to return, and die at home at last.

To point out other similitudes equally striking would be more tedious than difficult. There is not only a general resemblance in the style of the two poems, but the same peculiarities, and whole lines exactly the same occur in both. As to the charge of barbarism, and violation of the rules of syntax, brought by Schneider against the Cynegetics, it is not well supported. Belu shows that the passages selected to justify the charge are sanctioned by the example of the best Greek writers; and that the anomalies imputed to Oppian might, with equal reason, be imputed to Homer, Pindar, Lucian, and others. He is accused, for instance, of making a masculine singular agree with a verb plural, though the highest classical examples authorize the practice, when the noun is a collective, or when it indicates a genus and not an individual. Because a word, or a phrase, an ingenious metaphor, or *callida junctura*, happens to be rare, or to be found only in one author, it does not follow that it must be a barbarism. Such a canon would be fatal to the spirit of a writer, oblige him to follow, with servile steps, the tracks of his predecessors, debar him from every "brave disorder," and crush every attempt at originality.\*

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\* Schneider condemns the following passage as barbarous:

*Aιετος αιθριοστοι επιδυνατη γυαλοισι,*

but says not wherefore. It is justified by the example of the verses attributed to Orpheus;

*εμπειργητη δι κηφαινεις  
αιθρος οι γυαλοισι.*

and it will, no doubt, strike the reader of taste as truly poetical. *The eag'le rushing impetuously on the ethereal concaves, and the thunder roaring in the concaves of ether,* are sublime images. The former reminds us of Gray's eagle—

Whatever merit Schneider may possess as the editor of a Greek work, his observations on the style of the Cynegetics, lay him under the imputation of deficiency in those qualities of taste which have the keenest perception and highest relish of the beauties of classical composition. The erudition of Bentley, though so successfully employed in rectifying or altering the text of Horace, and other classical writers, by no means qualified him for being an useful editor of Milton. The province of a verbal corrector, and that of a liberal and enlightened critic, are very distinct ; and though I am not prepared to maintain that the very requisites of the one tend to disqualify for the other, it will scarcely be denied that minute and laborious attention to words, is often fatal to the spirit of liberal criticism ; and that a false quantity, or erroneous punctuation, may be detected by the pedant who shall suffer beauties of the very highest order to escape unnoticed. There are critics, indeed, who enjoy the happy talent of uniting a strict observance of all the niceties of style, to the feeling and comprehension with which the works under their judgment were composed ; who read with the same spirit as the author wrote, and who, from stooping to the correction of a point or accent, rise and accompany the philosopher and poet, in researches the most profound, and in flights the most elevated. But, among those who assume the office of criticising, how few shall we find of this description ?

Though it is to be regretted that the history of Oppian is not more circumstantial, we may learn from what has been preserved

Sailing with supreme dominion,  
Through the azure depths of air :

The latter of Milton's thunders when they

" Bellow'd through the vast and boundless deep."

of it, that he was endowed with some of the most amiable virtues, particularly filial piety, which forms a most beautiful and interesting trait in his character. He was also sincerely attached to the land of his birth, as is demonstrated by some passages in his poems, as well as by the circumstance of his having left all the attractions of the Roman court to return to his native city, where he died. If an author's works may be considered as a fair reflection of his mind, we may contemplate Oppian in this mirror, with improvement and delight. Though not blessed with a belief or knowledge of revelation, he was a firm believer in the equity, wisdom, and goodness of Providence; as what honest and enlightened lover of nature is not? "His admirable lessons of morality on all occasions," says Kennet, "especially that most wise and elegant reflection at the beginning of the second book of the Halieutics, on the weakness of mankind in the smallest matters, without the influence and assistance of heaven, show him to have been one of the most rational and best principled of heathens; and that his works are able to teach us nobler secrets, than the mysteries of hunting and fishing." He evinces great tenderness of disposition, with just detestation of cruelty; and paints the influence of natural affection in colours inimitably beautiful. He has been praised for his love of truth, for his exposure of certain vulgar errors, and for a virtue seldom found in a heathen writer,—modesty; as, when he speaks of a certain fish, with whose trivial name he would not pollute his page, he describes it by a circumlocution. I could wish there had been more room for this part of his eulogy. Regard for the moral virtues is the first and highest praise of every writer. But the genius which is employed in embellishing vice, and

rendering corruption palatable, is deserving the reprobation of every lover of mankind.

Oblivion whelm the amatory lay  
 In whose inebriate, deep-drugged current, rolls  
 The soft pollution that corrodes the heart,  
 And saps its virtue ! aye, tho' sweet it flow,  
 Moore sweet than ever flowed from Lesbian lyre,  
 Yet let it perish ! ne'er may ivy wreath,  
 Nor deathless laurel clasp the poet's brow,  
 Whose lyre corruption strings.

The works of Oppian are valuable to the naturalist, on account of their correct and beautiful descriptions of animals, and the view which they exhibit of the state of natural history at the period when they were written. If he has recorded many fables, he only availed himself of the poet's privilege. Some of these fables might have been received as true; others are such palpable inventions that they could not even be intended to misinform or deceive. Such are the stories of the boy and the dolphin; of the transformation of the nurses of Bacchus into lynxes; of Phineus becoming a mole, Myrrha a tree, and Mentha a plant; of the preservation of Arion; of Perseus and the Chimæra; of Progne and Philomela. These are the *speciosa miracula* of the Cynegetics and Halieutics.

The style of Oppian is perspicuous and florid; the versification flowing and harmonious. Sometimes he borders on affectation, and indulges a fondness for Ovidian graces. In describing a fish, as the fisherman draws it out of the sea, he calls it the "marine dancer."

*Εἰναλιον φορεπος δι' ἡερος ὁδοχηστηρα.*

Cyn. A. 61.

His metaphors are often daring, his apostrophes sublime, and his similes, not unfrequently, lengthened into minor episodes. These abound in his poems, and, like Homer's, are always instructive and amusing. He sometimes indulges an Asiatic style of hyperbole. He compares dogs, for instance, to the ridges of towering hills, and the elephant to the immense summit of a mountain, or to a weighty cloud bringing tempest to timid mortals.

*Φαιης κεν ιδων Ελεφαντα,  
Η κορυφην ὄρεος παναπειριτου, η νεφος αινου,  
Χειμα φερον δειλοισι βροτων, επι χερσον ὁδευειν.*

Yet this is not more hyperbolical than Homer's comparison of Hector to a “ moving mountain topt with snow,”

*ὄρεϊ μφόεντι εοικως.*

Or of a wild boar to a wooded promontory,

*Θρεψεν ἐπι χλαυην Συν ἀγριοι, ωδε' εμκει  
Θηρι γε σιτοφαγω ἀλλα γῆρ οὐληντι.*

A very marked characteristic of his style is a profusion of epithets. Having described the horse, he says,

*Τοιος μοι βαινος κρατερην θηρειον ενυω,  
Θυμαινων, συναεθλος, αρηιος, οβειμος ιππος.*

The Syrian bulls are,

Αιθωνες, χραστροι, μεγαληπορες, ευρυμεταποιοι,  
Αγραυλοι, σθεναροι, κερεαλκεες, αγριοθυμοι,  
Μυκηται, βλοσυροι, ζηλημουνες, ευρυγενειοι.

The arrows of love,

Τοιχες, αγριες δαιμονι, εχεις πυροεντας οιστας,  
Πευκεδανες, μαλερες, φθισιφρονας, οιστρηεντας,  
Τηκεδονα πνειοντας, αναλθεας, οισι και αιτας  
Θηρας ανεπτοιησας επ' αζυκτοισι ποδοισι;

The ape tribes,

Τις γαρ αν ε στυγεη τοιον γενος, εχθρον ιδεσθαι,  
Αβληγρον, στυγερον, δυσδερχετον, αιολοβελον

The cetaceous tribes

Κητεα δ' οεριμογυια, πελαρια, θαυματα ποιηται  
Αλκη αμαιμακετω βεβεριθοτα, δειμα μεν οσσοις,  
Εισιδεειν αιει δ' ολη κεκορυθμενα λυσση.

In this fondness for epithets he has imitated Homer, who frequently crowds his line with them ; for example,

δολιχοσκιον εγχοε,  
Βριδυ, μεγα, στιβαρον, κεκορυθμενον.

Αρες, Αρες, βροτολοιγε, μιαιφονε, τειχεσιπλητα.

These specimens may give a tolerably correct idea of one of the

most marked features of Oppian's style. His sentiments and moral reflections are well-timed and judicious. No poet has treated with more effect of the loves and antipathies of the brute tribes, of jealousy and love, the pains of parturition, the rage of famine, the admirable powers of the human mind, and the mutual affection of parents and their offspring, both in the human and irrational creation. His account of the love of the wild goat for her kids contains a noble specimen of his powers in the pathetic. In description, the great province of the poet, he is exceedingly animated. He draws with a pencil so bold and discriminating, and with a colouring so vivid, as to place the object before the eyes of the spectator *προ οφυατων ποιει το πειγματα* ;\* and, at the same time with an accuracy which the best naturalists might be proud to imitate. What ichthyologist has not admired and quoted his beautiful account of the Nautilus ? The noise and rage of his bull-fight, which shrinks not from a comparison with Virgil's, are nobly enhanced by the original simile of two war-ships engaging in battle. The attack on the stag by an army of serpents, and the efforts of the animal to extricate himself from their folds, are fearfully descriptive. The influence of spring on the animal creation would be worthy of Lucretius, nor is there in the whole range of Greek poetry a more spirited apostrophe than that to love.

Though Oppian sought and found untasted springs, he did not disdain to quaff of the fountains which had been discovered by his predecessors ; yet he is no servile imitator. Possessed of powers to shine as an original, he reads nature for himself, not only with the eye of a poet, but the discriminating judgment of a naturalist. Homer, in his comparison of the cranes bringing war and death on

\* Vide " Rittershusii de Vita Oppiani."

the pygmies, marks only the clamour\* with which they urge their flight. Oppian describes them as darkening the air with their broad and continuous files.

—————Ορνιθες ας

Ηυτε περ κλαγγη γερανων τελεις φρανοδις προ  
Αιτ' επι ον χειμωνα φυγου, και αθεσφατον ομβρον  
Κλαγγη ταιγε πετονται επ' ακεσνοιο ροσαν,  
Αιδεσι πυγμαιοιο φονον, και κηρα φερεσται.  
Ηερει δ' αρα ταιγε κακην εριδα προφερονται.

II. B.

Ως δ' οτ' απ' αιθιοπων τε και αιγυπτιοιο ροσαν  
Τψιπετης γερανων ΧΟΡΟΣ ερχεται περοφωνων  
Ατλαντος νιφοεντα παγου, και χειμα φυγεσται,  
Πυγμαιων τ' ολιγοδρανεων αμενηνα γενεδλα.  
Τησι δ' αριπταμενησι κατα ΣΤΙΧΑΣ ευρεες εσμοι  
Ηερα τε σκιαστι, και ΑΛΛΥΤΟΝ ΟΓΜΟΝ εχεσι.

Opp. Al. A.

As when from *A*ethiop, or Egyptian springs,  
The cranes' shrill chorus spread their soaring wings ;  
What time the feeble pygmy race they fly,  
The snows of Atlas, and the wintry sky :—  
In files unbroken moves the long array,  
Their shade deep-darkening all th' ethereal way.

\* Pope says “with noise and order, war and death they bring.” But no order is mentioned in the original, nor shou'd it in the translation; for Homer's object is to contrast the disorderly approach of the Trojans to the well-disciplined march of the Greeks.

Virgil has imitated Homer with far inferior success :

Quales sub nubibus atris,  
Strymoniae dant signa grues, atque æthera tranant  
Cum sonitu, fugiuntque notos, clamore secundo.

Lucan shews more observation than Virgil ; but, I apprehend, a naturalist would not have admitted chance as the disposer of the orderly arrangement of the cranes in their flight.

Strymona sic gelidum, bruma pellente, relinquunt,  
Poturæ te, Nile, grues, primoque volatu  
Effingunt varias, casu monstrante, figuræ.  
Mox ubi percussit tensas Notus altior alas,  
Confusos temerè immixtæ glomerantur in orbes,  
Et turbata perit dispersis litera pennis.

LUCAN. lib. v. 711.

The bird hastening with food to her young, and the joy which they express at her appearance, are beautifully described in the following lines of Oppian :

Ως δ' οποτ' απτηνεσσι φερει βοσιν ορταλιχοισι  
Μητηρε ειαρινη ζεφυρε πρωταγγελος ορνις  
Οιδ' απαλον τρυζοντες επιδρωσκοσι καλεη  
Γηθοσυνοι περι μητρι, και ιμειροντες εδωδης  
Χειλος αναπτυσσοσιν απαν δ' επι δωμα λεληκεν  
Ανδρος ξεινοδοκοιο λιγα κλαζεσι νεοσσοις.

As when the bird that heralds rosy spring,  
 Flies to her nest on fond maternal wing :  
 At her known voice, the tender callow brood  
 Leap with delight, and ask th' expected food ;  
 With opening bills around her fondly crowd,  
 And tell their joy in chirrups clear and loud,  
 Till all the hospitable dome around  
 That shields their nest, re-echoes to the sound.

Nor is her grief for the loss of her unfledged progeny, when devoured by a serpent, less faithfully painted. He had a passage of Homer in view, but he has improved on his original.

Ως δ' οποτ' ορταλιχοίσι χελιδόσι ηπιαχοίσι  
 Νερέν υπεξ ορθοῖο τυχῶν οφίς αγχί πελασση,  
 Καὶ τὺς μὲν κατεπεφύε καὶ εσπάσεν ενδον οδοντῶν,  
 Μητῆρ δὲ πρώτον μὲν ατυζόμενη δεδονηται  
 Λοιγία τετραγυια φονε γονον· αλλ' οτε παιδας  
 Αθρηση φθίμενας, ηδ' ψκετι φυξιν ολεντρε  
 Διζέται, αλλ' ἀντησιν υπαι γεννεσσιν δρακοντος  
 Ειλεται, μεσφ' ορνιν ελῃ παιδοκτονος ατη.

HAL. E. l. 579.

Thus when a serpent creeps, with hunger stung,  
 Where hangs the swallow's nest of twittering young ;  
 As down his cruel jaws he draws the prize,  
 'The wretched dam around him screaming flies,  
 Their fate bewailing, 'till her helpless brood  
 Have all become th' insatiate monster's food :

Then, pierced with anguish, and with deep despair,  
 And deeming life no longer worth her care,  
 Seeks his fell jaws, and lets the fate that slew  
 The hapless offspring, slay the parent too.

The description of the war-horse is very noble. The poet is supposed to have imitated Job, but I see no such resemblance as will justify the supposition. No heathen poet has equalled the sublimity of Job. The “neck clothed in thunder” is an image of unrivalled grandeur. *הַתְלֵבִישׁ צוֹאָרוֹ רַעֲמָה* This is but feebly rendered by the Septuagint *ενεδυσας τραχηλω αυτω φοβον*. Our translation is much superior, since it preserves the image and the spirit of the original.

If the testimony of critics be deemed necessary for the confirmation of the opinions expressed in this essay, of Oppian’s merits as a poet, it may be had in abundance. Almost every distinguished critic and naturalist, since the publication of his poems, have been among his admirers. The scholiasts of Homer, Theocritus, Nicander, and Lycophron, speak of him with esteem. Tzetzes paraphrased his Halieutics in Greek, and Laurentius Lippus, an Italian, translated them into Latin. An elegant translation into Latin hexameters was made by David Peifer, an illustrious Saxon, in the sixteenth century, and lately published by Schneider. Erasmus, Barthius, Melanthon, Faber, and Sir Thomas Brown, with Gesner and Aldrovandus, have given him their meed of praise. But no one of all his eulogists is more warm in his panegyric than J. C. Scaliger. Language seems feeble in expressing his enthusiastic admiration of a poet whom, of all the Greek writers, he considers as the only one worthy to be placed by the side of Virgil.

It is not, however, to be concealed that all critics are not equally favourable. Rapin terms him dry. “ Nicander est dur, Oppian est sec.” Little credit can be attached to such sweeping criticism. It is scarcely to be imagined that the taste which has a true relish for the didactic style of the Georgics, could coincide in the sentiments of the French critic. The curse of Tantalus must have been upon him, when he pronounced Oppian dry.

The learned Gilbert Wakefield, in a letter to Fox, says of Oppian, that “ he is very puerile, and writes in a false style; but his descriptions are entertaining and exact. He alone, of all the antiquits, delineates the cameleopard very accurately, and from nature. He will recompense the trouble of perusal.” Something warmer might have been expected from the admirer and editor of Lucretius. If it be conceded that there are instances of false taste in Oppian, they are comparatively few; not so many, perhaps, in proportion to the number of his lines, as may be found in Ovid, whom Wakefield considered as “ the first poet of all antiquity.” The great abhorrence felt by the critic for field sports, may have given an unfavourable bias to his judgment of the author of the Cynegetics.

To the mere English reader the works of Oppian have been made known, but very partially and imperfectly, by a translation of the Ha- lieutics
, edited at Oxford in 1722. The two first books were translated by Mr. Diaper, and the remaining three by Mr. Jones. The latter speaks with the zeal of friendship of Mr. Diaper’s translation, and though he allows that he has somewhat paraphrased the author, believes “ that he has no where deviated from his sense and intention.” The great fault of the translation is undoubtedly its verbiage, under which the beauty and spirit of the original are buried. In one passage twelve lines are employed to render three of the original; and

in another, no fewer than thirty to represent nine. But this is not to translate. Though a single grace or illustration may be admitted by a translator, provided it be done rarely, and in the true spirit of the original, such licentiousness should never be tolerated. It turns beauty into deformity, and sinks the sublime to the bathos.

**ERRATUM**, page 24, note, 3d line,—*for volumine, &c. read volumini integros.*